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RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000829

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV AM TU AJ

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: PRESIDENT INTENT TO ENFORCE TURKISH
"PROMISES" IN THE WAKE OF PROTOCOLS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Lu, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Azerbaijani reaction to the signing of the Turkey-Armenia protocols has been cagey but restrained. The interval between the announcement of the "road map" in April and the ultimate signing of the protocols appears to have given Aliyev time to overcome his anger at what he still perceives as a betrayal by Turkey. Baku now appears to be looking at the issue clinically, with a view to keeping the pressure on Erdogan to hold out on ratification and the opening of the border until progress acceptable to Baku is achieved on Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). A senior advisor to Aliyev said that the signing was a disappointment and that Baku sees no evidence of American and EU activism to solve NK. President Aliyev is now focused on ensuring that Erdogan - whom he distrusts - is unable to grasp at a minor piece of good news to justify moving forward, while stepping back from irrevocable steps while the ratification is still in doubt.
End Summary.

Official Reactions Negative But Measured

¶2. (C) Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Novruz Mammadov told the Charge that Azerbaijan was very disappointed over the events in Zurich (the protocol signing) and Chisinau (the Minsk Group organized meeting of the two Presidents). Mammadov had accompanied Aliyev to Chisinau. He said that the only reason the Turkey-Armenia process was moving ahead was EU and American pressure, but he could see no such resolve to push forward a resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh. "I personally believe there will be no results. Three Foreign Ministers went to Zurich. No U.S. Secretary of State has ever visited Azerbaijan in its 17 years of independence. We want to maintain our trust in the U.S., but the people of Azerbaijan are losing this trust," he remarked. He concluded by noting that Baku is now waiting to see whether the Turkish Parliament will act.

¶3. (SBU) As expected, Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry issued a negative statement following the October 10 signing. The statement acknowledged Ankara and Yerevan's right to pursue their relations as they wish but was very clear that Baku would regard the opening of the border without an end to Armenian occupation of its territory as an affront to Azerbaijani interests that would "eclipse the spirit of

fraternal relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey" and "call into question the regional peace and security architecture." While certainly tough, the statement appeared to be calibrated so as to be clear that there is no rupture yet in Azerbaijani-Turkish relations.

¶4. (SBU) President Aliyev took the unusual step of granting a full-length interview - his first in three years - to the state television network on the eve of the signing, following his meetings with Armenian President Sargsian (bilaterally and with Russian President Medvedev) in Chisinau. Aliyev characterized the meeting as negative and explained his view that the normalization should only happen simultaneously with linkage. In the interview, Aliyev said he "trusted" the assurances Azerbaijan has extracted from senior Turkish officials including President Gul, Prime Minister Erdogan, Foreign Minister Davutoglu and parliamentary speaker Mehmet Ali Shahin, that Turkey would withhold ratification until the NK problem is resolved. Without this, he said, Armenia would adopt even more uncompromising positions in the NK talks.

¶5. (SBU) Thus far there has been little public unrest and few demonstrations against Turkish interests, although the public mood is basically negative toward the protocols. The ineffectual Karabakh Liberation Organization (KLO) staged a small protest outside the Turkish Embassy, burning effigies of Gul, Erdogan and Davutoglu. A few protestors, including the organization's leader, were arrested and released. The Embassy refused to accept the written complaints of the protestors. All local media also gave significant attention to reports that spectators at the Turkey-Armenia soccer match

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would be forbidden from bringing Azerbaijani flags to the stadium. In general, the Azerbaijani media, as the International Crisis Group's Tabib Huseynov notes, choose one of three explanations for the "betrayal" by Turkey: Ankara's EU aspirations, Turkish desire to dispense with the genocide question, or they believe that the rapprochement is a Western-inspired plan to strip Armenia from Russia's sphere of influence.

Turkey Responding With Diplomacy, Visits

¶6. (C) The GOAJ's carefully crafted public statements citing the assurances of Turkish leaders together with the local media's less nuanced presentation of facts have compelled a Turkish response. In addition to Erdogan and Davutoglu's public statements following the signing referring to the NK problem, the Turkish Embassy in Baku issued its own statement citing Erdogan to the effect that the "border cannot be re-opened unless the occupied Azerbaijani territories are released," and saying that the processes have to be "simultaneous." (Note: The Turkish Embassy referred separately in its statements to NK and the surrounding occupied territories. End Note.) Turkey is also pursuing a new round of diplomacy, with a parliamentary delegation set to arrive in Baku October 18 (Erdogan received and reassured Azerbaijani parliamentarians on October 14), and a visit by Foreign Minister Davutoglu expected October 21-22 for the BSEC meeting of foreign ministers.

Aliyev Not Buying It

¶7. (C) Despite his expressions of "trust" in Turkish promises, it is clear that when it concerns Erdogan, Aliyev is going to judge by actions rather than words. Many observers judge that Aliyev harbors significant personal doubts about the Turkish government and Erdogan in particular, and he may believe that Erdogan would grasp at

the thinnest possible evidence of "progress" on NK to justify moving forward with ratification and opening the border. This is likely why Aliyev insisted that the Minsk Group Co-Chairs' characterization of the Chisinau meeting not include any form of the word.

¶8. (C) Comment: Azerbaijan's response to the signing of the Turkey-Armenia protocols so far has been logical and unsurprising. The lack of emotion in public statements thus far is reflective of Baku's preference to keep all of its options open until the last moment - in this case, not to take a precipitous measure with respect to Turkey while the fate of the protocols is still in the air. Azerbaijan has also cleverly couched its statements in terms Turkish leaders have already used; thus Baku is able to express its views in terms of its trust in Turkish promises, rather than explicit demands on Ankara. However, it is early in the process and it would be reasonable to expect Baku to be less restrained as the protocols proceed toward a final parliamentary vote.

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